

GYMBAND

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Introduction

This program is a self-guided journey for people who struggle with programming their training and staying consistent in the gym. It is important to understand from the start that this is not coaching nor personal training; it is a structured, detailed one-year plan that is intentionally varied so you do not get bored and quit. The point of the program is not only to give you workouts, but to help you understand how training actually works in practice: how your body responds, what feels safe and effective for you, what you tolerate well, and what you should avoid. By the end of the year, the goal is that you are no longer dependent on random routines or motivation, but that you have enough experience to adjust the training yourself and build your own plan.

The most important thing, especially in the beginning, is structure. You are allowed to change exercises if something does not feel right for your body, and you should not feel trapped by the exact list on the page. At this stage there are two main aspects that matter: the mental aspect and the physical aspect. The exercises themselves are less important than your consistency, your nutrition, and your rest. Your motivation usually comes from progress, whether that progress is strength, aesthetics, or simply feeling better week by week. If you show up for a month and you feel no progress at all, you will be tempted to quit, and that is why the program starts in a way that may look unusual: the first phase is not designed for performance or progression. The first progress you need to make is mental, because the habit of showing up is what creates everything else.

Think about gym consistency the same way you think about nutrition. If you tell yourself “I will skip just today” or “I will have a cheat meal just today,” how long until that becomes a regular pattern? At the same time, there is another risk: if your motivation is high and your discipline is suddenly strong, your muscles and joints may still not be ready for heavy training, and you can easily injure yourself. This is why the slow start is not a weakness of the program, it is the safest and most reliable way to build a long-term base.

Instructions

First, read the PDF once from start to finish, and then come back to it whenever you enter a new phase. The idea is simple: you go to the gym and you train, even if you are having a bad day. If you feel weak or tired, you still go, you use less weight, you do fewer reps if needed, and you finish the session without forcing anything. Consistency matters more than one perfect workout.

If you take a break from the program, you should decide how to restart based on how long the break was. If the break is short, you can usually continue where you left off, although you may want to reduce the weight slightly in the first week back. If the break is longer than two weeks, or simply feels like a long break for your body, the best approach is to repeat the last full week you completed, but with significantly lighter weights than you think you need. That may feel too easy mentally, but it helps your nervous system and your joints adapt again before you go back to heavier work, and you will usually regain strength quickly once you restart.

Before each training session, warm up for a few minutes. For every exercise, make sure you use proper form and that you train safely. Whenever you bench press or barbell squat, you should use a spotter or take safety measures seriously, because these are the lifts where mistakes are most likely to become dangerous.

Start

Start by writing your bodyweight. Bodyweight has to be a number, in either kilograms or pounds, but you must keep the same unit for the entire Excel sheet so your tracking remains consistent.

At the beginning you need to reserve two days to test a few exercises. Start with Test Day 1. The goal is to warm up and then find a weight you can lift for 12 reps that feels moderately challenging. This is not a maximum effort test, not a strength test; it is simply a way to estimate your starting level so the program can generate reasonable values. Take each exercise separately, warm up for each one, and do not do more than 12 reps even during warm-up sets. Gradually increase the weight until the set feels challenging but still clean and controlled. If the last reps look forced or sloppy, choose a lighter weight and write that instead.

On Test Day 2 you do the same process, but with an 8-rep range. This second day is especially important: do not go close to maximum effort. If you push too hard, you will not only get inaccurate numbers, but you also risk training stress that your body is not prepared for yet. The weights you are looking for on both days should make you feel the muscles working in that rep range, while still leaving you with a few clean reps in reserve after the last repetition.

Phase 1

Phase 1 is about re-adaptation if you have trained before, or pure learning if you are new to the gym. The first two weeks include a varied selection of exercises so you can experience different movements and figure out what feels right for your body. The most important rule here is not to go heavy. Use lighter weights, move in a controlled way, and pay attention to how your body reacts. If any exercise creates discomfort, pain, or an unstable feeling, change it with something similar.

After you fill in the values on the Start page, the Excel sheet will generate recommended weights and set/rep structures for you. Because everyone is different, the best way to use those recommendations is to start with the suggested weight for your first set and then adjust slightly during the session if needed. A key part of this phase is tracking: during Week 1 you perform the session, then you write the real weights you used into Week 3; during Week 2 you do the same and write the real weights into Week 4. The reason is that Weeks 1 and 3 match each other, and Weeks 2 and 4 match each other, so by the end of the month you have two full weeks documented with real working numbers.

During Weeks 3 and 4 you repeat the same weights. Do not increase weight, do not chase reps, and do not treat this month as a strength phase. The goal is control, confidence, and developing the mind-muscle connection while building the habit of showing up. The correct mindset is: this first month is not about increasing power; it is about completing the work consistently and learning the movements safely.

This phase is an adaptation of a Push/Pull/Legs structure, but with only one leg-focused day per week. The reason is that legs usually create more soreness than upper body work, and training legs twice per week at this stage can be overwhelming and can damage consistency, which is exactly what we are trying to build first.

Phase 2

After Phase 1, you should have a clear idea of how the exercises feel and what weights you can work with. Phase 2 lasts two months and this is where progression begins. The most important consideration before you add weight is that progression does not mean changing the way the exercise looks. If you have to cheat your form, rush the rep, shorten the range of motion, or lose control just to add weight, that is not progress; it is a shortcut that can slow you down long-term and can also cause injuries.

Progress here should be smooth and patient, especially because at this stage you will still adapt quickly. Each week has a target rep range, and you should write down both the weight you used and the reps you actually performed. A simple way to progress is to keep the weight the same and add one repetition from the previous session. When you consistently reach the top of the target rep range with good form, you are in a good position to increase the weight slightly and start again near the lower end of the range. In general, bodyweight exercises, cable work, and dumbbell movements often progress through repetitions first, while big compound lifts usually benefit from small weight increases over time. The core skill you develop here is learning to track, observe, and adjust based on execution, not based on ego.

Phase 3

Phase 3 becomes more precise and introduces the structure of strength training more directly. You train four days per week around four main exercises: bench press, overhead press, barbell squat, and deadlift. Two key concepts appear here: accessories and RPE.

In this program, accessories are exercises that support the main lifts. The approach is beginner-friendly: you choose a favourite pushing movement from the previous phase and write it into the “Accessory #1” field (the default option is Incline DB Bench Press), then you choose a preferred pulling movement in “Accessory #2,” and finally you choose one lower-body accessory based on what you want to work on. This allows the plan to stay structured while still adapted to your style.

RPE means Rating of Perceived Exertion, and in this program we use a 0-10 scale to describe how difficult a set feels. A practical way to understand it in the beginning is by relating it to the idea of “reps in reserve.” For example, imagine you perform a set and you feel that, with perfect form, you could have done about 12 repetitions with that weight, but the target was only 8. In that case you had roughly 4 repetitions left in reserve, which would correspond to an effort of around RPE 6. As a simple starting rule, you can estimate your RPE by subtracting the number of clean reps you believe you still have left from 10. This is not a perfect definition, because RPE is not purely a repetition-based system. In reality, RPE reflects overall fatigue, meaning that the same number of reps can feel very different depending on how tired you are, how fast the bar is moving, and how much effort the set truly requires. However, using reps in reserve as an approximation is a very useful beginner-friendly way to start learning the concept. Over time, you will develop a more accurate sense of effort through practice. As a general guideline in this program, we do not aim to work below RPE 6, and during the first three weeks of this phase it is best to keep most working sets around RPE 7-8.

This phase ends with the first 1RM test, meaning the maximum weight you can lift for a single repetition. Safety matters here: warm up properly, use a spotter when needed, and increase weight gradually. A simple approach is to choose a weight you could easily perform for 5 reps, then build up step by step to a heavy single. Your results are written in the black rectangle fields next to each main lift, and they are important because the next phase uses those numbers for calculations.

Phase 4

Phase 4 is a bench-focused progression phase with predetermined values so you know exactly how much weight to increase. The main goal is to bring your bench press up while you still benefit from relatively fast progression. You also have a progression template for deadlift and squat to maintain improvement there, but bench is the priority because it often progresses more slowly and plateaus more easily.

Overhead press is treated as a secondary movement here. You are given a starting value, but we do not push aggressive weekly progression on it because your shoulders already receive a high amount of stress from the bench volume. Any exercise that is not a main lift in this phase should be done with medium to low weight; the goal is not to chase load, but to perform the movement slowly, correctly, and consistently. Because intensity increases here, using a spotter and training safely becomes even more important. This phase is not easy, but it is manageable if recovery is solid. If the programmed weight increase feels too steep, it is completely acceptable to repeat the previous week's weight, as long as you record what you did. The purpose is to lift heavier without changing the quality of your training, which is why you are not training to failure on every set. Your effort should approach roughly RPE 9 only on the last bench press set of the day; the earlier sets should not feel like a fight.

Phase 5

Phase 5 is based on structured intensity waves. After building a strength foundation, the next programming skill you learn is cycling effort instead of trying to push the same way every week. The structure is inspired by 5/3/1, but with a change in rep ranges. The claim is not that this is “better” than the original system; for advanced lifters it may even be less appropriate. However, at this stage you still adapt quickly, and the original progress curve can feel slow. The adjusted rep scheme gives you more weekly practice with technique while still following the same philosophy of planned intensity.

This phase consists of three cycles of four weeks. In Week 1 of each cycle, you use a medium weight at around RPE 6-7 for sets of 8 reps. In Week 2, you aim for sets of 5 reps around RPE 7-8. Week 3 combines both: you use the same weights to perform sets of 8 and then 5 reps, and on the final set you choose a weight that allows at least 2 reps at RPE 9, but no more than 4 reps at RPE 10. AMRAP means “as many reps as possible,” and after the session you write the number of reps you actually completed instead of the AMRAP label.

Week 4 is the first true deload phase in the program. Deload means reducing the weight intentionally so your nervous system and joints can recover from the accumulated stress. The deload weight should not be the same as Week 1; it should be noticeably lighter. During this phase you also start using more bodyweight movements such as push-ups and chin-ups, and you can add some cardio for endurance. Because bodyweight strength varies greatly between individuals, there is not a strict rep prescription for those; you should test and adjust based on your level. Across these three months, the focus remains technique and consistency, so do not rush weight increases.

Phase 6

Phase 6 is a bridge between Phase 5 and Phase 7. It is a volume-focused block that continues the Phase 5 style, but introduces a new concept: back-off sets. In the spreadsheet you will notice that the main lifts have a target of 8 reps first, and then additional sets appear with a target of 5 reps; those are the back-off sets. The idea is that you work up so the final main working set is hard (close to failure, but still controlled), and then you reduce the weight and complete the back-off sets with better speed and cleaner technique. The deload in this phase is done the same way as in Phase 5, so by now you should already understand how to reduce training stress without losing rhythm.

Phase 7

Phase 7 is the final phase and acts as an introduction to powerlifting concepts, allowing you to experiment with more specialized training and understand what you might want to do next. In this phase, the RPE field is treated differently: it is no longer a diary where you record how the set felt, but a target you should aim to respect. In other words, RPE becomes guidance that controls intensity, rather than a number you write afterward without consequence.

You will also notice that some “accessory” exercises are actually variations of the main lifts. That is intentional. The purpose of variations is to strengthen the weak parts of the movement and improve the main lift indirectly, while still keeping training specific. Another important detail is that some back-off set fields may display a value of zero at first; this happens because the formulas depend on the weight you enter for the top set. Once you write the first set’s weight, the back-off values will be calculated automatically.

This phase ends with a week of 1RM testing. As always, treat this as a serious session: warm up completely, increase gradually, and prioritize safety.

Finally, notice how Phase 7 is structured conceptually: it begins with variation lifts taking priority, and then the second block shifts focus toward the competition lift first, followed by a variation. This is not random, it reflects a common programming idea. You build volume and reinforce technique, then use variations to improve weak points while still practicing the main lift, and only after that you return to heavier, more specific competition work. Your job at this stage is to identify what your weaknesses are, learn which variations help you the most, and understand how to design training that keeps you consistent and improving over time.

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